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ABSTRACT

Preparing today's work force for future technological changes is part of the mission of institutions of higher education. A pivotal role in overseeing and managing this function is played by vocational deans, who are responsible for overseeing the training and development of both students and instructional staff. Deans need management and conflict resolution skills in order to provide a vision and lead staff and students while ensuring the smooth flow of day-to-day operations. Vocational deans are responsible for evaluating and monitoring students' acquisition of job skills, maintaining good relationships with the business community and advisory boards, enabling and accepting faculty input, and fostering staff professional development in order to implement new ideas. Vocational deans at community or technical colleges can take 15 steps to create this environment, including living by the highest level of integrity and ethics, setting and developing priorities, being tough but fair with people, and believing in corporate citizenship. The vocational deans' abilities in developing a professional team of vocational instructors and interfacing with the business community will facilitate the acquisition of work-related and job competency-based skills by the workers of tomorrow. (Contains 30 references.) (KC)

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THE VOCATIONAL DEAN: FIRST LINE LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT SKILLS REQUIRED IN THE NEW WORKPLACE OF INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY

by
Gene E. Fusch

Abstract

The position of vocational dean has always been an important position within the educational institution. In the coming years, that position will become even more critical and pivotal to the success of the institution in terms of student learning skills retention and the success of any program under the vocational dean's jurisdiction.

Preparing today's workforce for the coming technological changes and the advent of the informational and technical age is both a group and an individual effort for the many educational facilities. As a part of these facilities, the vocational dean, as an individual, is responsible for overseeing the training and development of both the student and the instructional staff, in order to facilitate this new tone and method on instruction.

Using appropriate management abilities, these new skills and the new tone of the educational institution can be communicated to others with little disruption or conflict in day-to-day operations. With correct evaluation and monitoring of job skill acquisition, maintaining good relationships with the business community and advisory boards, enabling and accepting faculty input, and fostering staff professional development, the vocational dean can insure that new ideas have been communicated and implemented. With this assurance, the vocational dean has accomplished the task of preparing the future workforce for the changes to come.

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The Emergence of the Technological/Information Age

Contrary to current circumstances, the United States was not always a nation of predominantly skilled workers. The US is a nation that was founded upon agricultural pursuits, with a substantial number of its workers centered in agricultural labor and the majority of its population living in rural areas. For proof, one only had to look at the large number of large land holdings amongst the populace, as well as notice the country's extensive agricultural export base of the sixteen and seventeen hundreds.

As students of American history know, the advent of the American Industrial Revolution changed all this, and the country's agricultural predominance was no more. Instead, as technology advanced the US became an industrialized nation, leaving behind its agricultural roots, further diminishing these roots in importance and strategic position within the American market system. As a result, the majority of American workers also left the farm and rural areas and migrated to the cities to obtain employment within the burgeoning industrial factory workplace. Thus began the shift of the populace from rural to urban homes. In 1916, the US rural population peaked at 32.5 million. By 1989, only 4.8 million remained. Smith (1990).

In turn, as the industrial era ended in the 1970's and 1980's, it, too, was left behind and eclipsed by the changing times. This was evidenced by the closure of numerous factories and steel mills, and the emergence of increasing employment in the service and informational sectors. The informational/technical era had begun, requiring a growing

need and demand for new and different skills not readily available in the workforce in large numbers.

The Growing Need for Skilled Workers

When a nation changes from an industrial economy to one that is based upon information and technology, the need for skilled workers to perform its many job functions changes as well. In order to provide these skilled workers for the changing market-place and meet the demand, education and training must also change.

The growing demand for skilled workers, coupled with rapid advances in technology and the decreasing numbers of non-skilled jobs, make it imperative now, and in the future, that educational institutions educate and train skilled and non-skilled people to fill that need in the workplace. Unless people can be trained to fill those positions, the employment positions will not be filled. Therefore, today's workers will not be able to find employment in the new informational-technical world. Preparing today's workforce for tomorrow's job challenges is both a group and an individual effort for the nation's many educational facilities. As a group, the community and technical colleges are meeting that challenge. At the individual level, are the managers of the individual departments at each college, in particular, the vocational dean.

The Changing Role and Duties of the Vocational Dean

The person filling the position of vocational dean in the community or technical college is in a pivotal position. He or she is the facilitator of new trends appearing in the

workforce of the marketplace, setting the tone and the method of new educational forces. Therefore, the vocational dean has been given the challenge of overseeing the training and development of today's workforce, both skilled and non-skilled, the students, in order to meet the needs of the changing workplace. The vocational dean has also been given the task of training the instructors, who train these new workers for the changing marketplace.

As facilitator of new trends in training, it is the responsibility of the vocational dean to provide the department with quality, competency-based courses that meet the new demands of the prospective worker and, consequently, the marketplace. By providing these courses, he or she enables instructors to teach students the knowledge and skills required to master the competencies of the workplace and, thereby, find employment.

In addition to providing new and/or improved courses, the vocational dean of the community or technical college facilitates quality instruction, by coaching, assisting, and directing instructors with their programs.

When there is a change in course and outlook within the institution, as the changing workforce dictates, the vocational dean assists the instructors in the development of new programs and courses that best fit the needs of the school, its students, and the marketplace. As Barnett (1990) says: "The instructor needs both peer coaching and positive administrator coaching for the best performance" (p. 63).

In addition to facilitating instructor development of new programs and courses, close working relationships with business assists the vocational dean in developing new courses and/or revising existing courses, to meet the needs and competencies required in

the workplace. In other words, by interacting with the business community, the vocational dean meets their needs as well, by providing competency-based courses.

As the facilitator of new trends in education and the work-place, the vocational dean of the community or technical College also locates and manages classrooms, labs, and shops to hold classes in. Quality programs cannot be offered if there are neither classrooms, labs, or shops in which to teach them. When developing new courses to meet the needs of industry, the vocational dean also locates and manages new or additional classrooms to hold classes in. This is one of the major job responsibilities of the position, says Hagenau (1975) in his work Mid-Management , Education For Management in Washington State Community Colleges. He states, "Planning program activities, research and planning, budgeting, class scheduling," are all responsibilities of the position of associate dean. (p. 34).

As stated before, the position of vocational dean of the community or technical College is pivotal to the success of competency-based education and how that education applies to the changing skills needs of the workplace. By directing and training the instructional staff, locating and managing teaching facilities, developing new curriculum, and maintaining contacts with the business community, the vocational dean sets the tone and method of new educational forces present in the institution and the workplace.

Managing Staff and Instructors

Once all the pieces are in place, the vocational dean then directs attention and effort into maintaining the forward momentum of the new tone for education. In addition

to duties and responsibilities such as supervising building maintenance and conducting clerical staff performance evaluations, the vocational dean must also be concerned with ongoing leadership and management with regard to nurturing staff and environment. By so doing, the vocational dean creates the proper environment and workplace that facilitates instructor growth and professional development, as well as maintenance of the new education tone and methods.

Staff must be allowed to "realize their fullest potential", says Chait (1979, p. 48), by creating an environment conducive to this realization, thereby ensuring the forward momentum of positive changes in the outlook and management of the educational institution, such as Kelsey and Bates (1984) Negotiator. This environment may contain ongoing instructor development, a changing focus during performance evaluations, or new merits and awards for innovative program changes or improvements. Above all, the vocational dean, in order to avoid stagnation or backward momentum, avoids the zero-sum solution when fostering these new directions, as stated by Thompson and Dalton (1970).

The vocational dean at the community or technical college uses some specific steps when creating such a positive environment, there-by creating a mind-set within him or herself that influences their behavior positively towards setting new tones and directions within the educational institution. Taken from Myran (1983), in Strategic Management in the Community College, these fifteen steps, Myran states, further explain how the vocational dean can create this environment for faculty, by his or her own behavior:

1) live by the highest level of integrity and ethics,
2) set and develop priorities,

3) be willing to face through problems,
4) set and demand standards of excellence,
5) do what is best for the business,
6) seek rewards that are worth the risk,
7) provide clear directions,
8) keep it simple and direct,
9) have a sense of urgency,
10) avoid worrying about things over which you have no control,
11) be innovative by having the freedom to make mistakes,
12) be tough but fair with people,
13) be committed to a quality working environment,
14) believe in corporate citizenship, and,
15) have fun while accomplishing corporate and personal goals (p. 98).

In addition to setting the tone and nurturing the environment that fosters positive change, the vocational dean also takes specific action in several areas that enhance efforts towards change.

To achieve Myran's staff philosophy successfully and to further lead to the personal growth of instructors, the vocational dean should also make time for constructive work performance evaluations (Brazer 1991). Instructor evaluations are important for feedback, in order to encourage positive behaviors, as well as discourage inappropriate teaching methods that once more deflect the institutions from its new goals. By avoiding a propensity towards criticism and focusing on the vocational dean's goal to "keep the company's approach to performance appraisal open and future-oriented" (Thompson and Dalton 1970, p. 157), instructors are encouraged to focus attention on goal-setting and targets for reaching objectives set by both themselves and supervisors, rather than haggling over past mistakes and poor conduct.

In addition to performance evaluation duties, the vocational dean also assists and directs instructors in other areas of personal development, such as meeting the requirements for state vocational instructor certification. This assistance may take the

form of individual coaching, such as helping instructors choose appropriate courses to take, or aiding in filling out the correct forms.

Creating the proper environment and nurturing workplace to facilitate instructor growth also requires management of student problems. Student problems (including discipline) disrupt classrooms, interfering with the learning process for other students, as well as the teaching process for the instructor. It is certainly a distraction for all involved, therefore, the vocational dean assists instructors in preventing and resolving student problems.

The vocational dean of the community or technical college accomplishes this goal by fostering an environment whereby both students and instructors are treated as professionals. By doing so, the vocational dean finds that both students and instructors conduct themselves as such. In this type of environment, few student problems will arise, and both groups are encouraged to excel (Chait 1979). Therefore, it is to the advantage of the vocational dean to foster just such an environment, to encourage the learning process and deflect classroom distractions that prevent instructors from reaching their full potential.

The vocational dean also directs and assists instructors in instruction and curriculum development. Instructors at community and technical college's report increased job satisfaction and feelings of professionalism when given input into planning and program development, despite the additional work (David 1989). As Hertzberg (1968) states: "The only way to motivate employees is to give them challenging work in which they can assume responsibility" (p. 53).

In order to accomplish this, the vocational dean facilitates or coaches, rather than operates or dictates, giving instructors control over curriculums, student achievement, and student development (Sheive 1988). When the vocational dean gives respect, support, and positive direction, and schedules opportunities for instructors to share goals with colleagues, community and technical college instructors are willing and eager to examine their practices, ideas and need for growth (Duke 1990). Getting instructors to agree to change is one thing. Implementing the change is another. Allowing instructors a voice in those changes facilitates commitment to a new course of action.

By keeping faculty apprised of polices and procedures, current and future events, assignments and deadlines, the vocational dean keeps conflicts to a minimum. In addition, for good dean/faculty relationships, Chait (1979) goes on to say that administrators and deans should encourage and accept faculty ideas. Most of all, faculty and instructors should not be kept in the dark.

Conflict Resolution

The vocational dean, despite utilizing excellent management and leadership skills, will still receive complaints from faculty and instructors. When complaints are made, the vocational dean must listen carefully and act in a timely manor to resolve the problem. According to Denton and Boyd, the vocational dean should listen carefully and sincerely to the employee, paraphrase to insure that the complaint is correctly understood, carefully select proper terminology, and answer precisely (1990).

After the employee has made a complaint, care must be taken to be honest and not make any promises that cannot be kept. Denton and Boyd emphasize the necessity for the vocational dean to resolve all complaints before these complaints escalate into major conflicts and grievances (1990).

According to Steinmetz, after identifying the causes of the marginal or unsatisfactory faculty or instructor, the vocational dean can conduct therapeutic counseling sessions. Due to the professional level of faculty and instructors in the system, the counseling sessions should use the Hygienic School method, from Professor Frederick Hertzberg's theory, applying motivators such as recognition, self-esteem, and career development. (1979) Furthermore, all counseling should be conducted in the manner provided in Steinmetz's case study, whereby the employee is led into coming up with the solution for self improvement, and feels ownership for the plan, thereby succeeding. (1979)

There are other cases involving conflict stemming from unsatisfactory employee performance. In these type of cases, after all options have been acted upon and the unsatisfactory faculty or instructor does not improve, the vocational dean can terminate or fail to renew the non-tenured faculty or instructor's contract.

However, in the case of tenured instructors, the task is more difficult. The vocational dean must first document all efforts to counsel and assist the instructor, all of the instructor's unsatisfactory performances, and have enough material to convince the tenure review committee of the necessity for termination. After the vocational dean is prepared to terminate the instructor, he must develop a dehiring proposal, taking both the dehiring proposal and the termination package to the Vice President for Instruction and

Vice President of Human Resources and Development for approval. After approval, the administrator should tactfully plan a meeting with the instructor and propose the advantages of the instructor quitting. A dehiring agreement is the best solution for terminating a tenured instructor, for it can have a keep quiet agreement that would prevent unrest with other faculty and students and allow the instructor to save face. (Steinmetz 1979)

Monitoring Programs

In order to facilitate new directions in learning and acquiring marketable skills, the vocational dean focuses on maintaining and monitoring the new curriculum that he or she has developed and implemented.

Perhaps the most important of the vocational dean's tasks at the community or technical college is recruitment and selection of full time, part time, and adjunct instructors for the preparatory programs. The vocational dean looks for instructors who are masters of their craft, and who also have the desire and personality to perform as part of the department and the school. The person chosen should be that person best suited to the needs of the school.

Another crucial task for the vocational dean is his or her relationship and utilization of advisory boards for the many programs under his or her purview. Advisory boards at many community and technical colleges have traditionally comprised of various persons who are currently associated with the technical field in which their particular advisory

board represents. The members of an advisory board may consist of administrative, technical, supportive, or consultative staff. These boards are made up of ten to twelve persons, both male and female.

The vocational dean develops and maintains a good, professional working relationship with advisory committees. These advisory boards are the vocational dean's link to the business world in an advisory capacity, where the marketplace has a consultative function in its impact on training curriculum and placement.

In addition, the vocational dean also maintains contacts with business leaders apart from advisory boards and committees, monitoring the school's ability to train competent workers and place them in the workplace, ensuring that the correct skills are being taught, retained, and utilized.

The vocational dean monitors whether or not the students are receiving the proper work skills for the workplace, by encouraging and maintaining open relationships and contacts within the business community. These relationships and contacts facilitate gathering the correct information needed to research and assess educational programs that are required to deliver trained and skilled people to the workplace. Therefore, the vocational dean's business relationships and contacts assist him or her in guaranteeing quality, competency-based instruction, where the competencies mastered in the program are derived from the task of the workplace (ERIC 1992).

Finally, the vocational dean also takes responsibility for school and program promotion to fill school enrollments. To create awareness of the courses and offerings of the college with the public, business leaders, other schools and state agencies for student recruitment and placement, the vocational dean assists instructors in program promotion.

Working in close collaboration with instructors, businesses, career counselors, and the college promotion department, the vocational dean at community and technical college's develops unique and successful methods to promote programs and recruit potential students.

Networking

Networking within the department, school, or industry is a subject that is often neglected when speaking or writing about the duties and responsibilities of the vocational dean. Its importance and impact is recognized among fellow staff and administrative authority, yet networking's scope is not necessarily acknowledged on paper, such as job announcements or job descriptions. Myran (1983) states that the strategic manager develops external relations, both for program promotion and for personal development. These external relations are between "college and citizens, businesses, legislators, government officials, community leaders, potential students, and other groups" (p. 3).

Networking is important to get the word out about an educational institution's programs and courses offered. Therefore, the vocational dean at the community or technical college, in addition to networking for personal development, networks to promote college and vocational programs through such activities as serving on statewide educational committees, lobbying legislators currently effective in regards to pertinent legislation, or by attending career fairs (Myran 1983). In addition, as stated before, the vocational dean maintains open contact with the business community, for the same reasons.

Summary

The vocational dean at the community or technical college acts as a middle management person in the business sector, implementing and executing policies and procedures to manage consumer relations, yet adhering to college standards and practices.

Vocational programs are operated as a business, where the vocational dean acts as an entrepreneurial strategist. Hinterhuber (1992) describes an entrepreneurial strategist as one who "creates a corporate culture in which their vision, philosophy, and business strategies are implemented by employees who think independently" (p. 167). In other words, with the proper spirit and handling, the vocational dean at the community or technical college correctly and effectively guides new direction and sets new tone for the department, through leadership skills and technical managerial knowledge.

The vocational dean position at the community or technical college is a pivotal position in today's marketplace. The vocational dean plays an important role in technical training. It is the dean's ability to develop a professional team of vocational instructors that will facilitate the acquisition of work-related and job competency-based skills by the worker of tomorrow.

As America enters the informational/technical era of today and the future, it is imperative that its workforce have the needed skills to perform the tasks ahead. It is not enough to rely on past skills and abilities, as many jobs are now or will soon be obsolete. In order to meet the needs of the informational/technical society, today's workers must be trained for tomorrow. Our educational facilities and institutions must provide that training.

By applying the good management skills and administrative abilities, the vocational dean can help provide for America's survival in the coming informational, global economy.

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